

FILM REVIEW

By Stephen Arthur

Kaerajaan by Mikk Rand of Estonia is a short animated film that I was lucky enough to be able to see multiple times in one sitting. It's a surreal, pixilated-and-stop-motion, black-and-white, point-of-view film, using an iris effect that provokes a strong sense of memory and subjective experience. In films with such strong and strange visuals I usually can't see beyond the surface in the first viewing, so at first I took this film to be a pure surrealist film much like those of the Brothers Quay. But the hints of allegory and expressionism provoked me to keep replaying it. Each viewing magically revealed more to the story. We see everything from the dog's-eye view of some kind of despised and mistreated monster child, kept away from the world, and perhaps kept away from his father by the mother figure, of whom we see only the bare legs. The little creature escapes its apartment prison to wander around the strange world, seeing its marvels and experiencing its malevolent dangers, alone and vulnerable in a world populated by strange children's toys, which seem to act as empowered psychological projections. The story seems to express an Oedipal or Electra theme, as the mother is revealed as nothing human at all above the legs -- the search for the void of the mother that isn't whole, isn't there; or the killing of the mother to obtain the father: she is killed off by a child's toy. Along the way the child/creature is rejected and bombarded, to be pitied by a nurse who is a child's cutout drawing. Finally the central character is revealed at the end: a small embryo with head incased in a fibrous cast (which apparently fell upon it in the middle of the film). *Kaerajaan* is a wonderfully intriguing and rewarding experience, and in the end a terribly sad story. I don't know if the theme was intended as an allegory of life behind the Iron Curtain, but it worked for me as a universal expression of the experience of coming into a cruel world. I saw many Estonian films at Ottawa 98, all of them surreal and none of them making sense to me in a single viewing, but all enjoyable. The chance to watch one of these films many times was very rewarding and I highly recommend doing this. This film has helped reveal to me the true power of expertly-done surrealism, over any other method, to convey strong and unforgettable subjective experience.